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ABSTRACT

Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) is a program designed to help underachieving students with academic potential prepare for entrance into colleges and universities. An evaluation of the AVID program was conducted to determine program effects. Program participants are primarily from low-income and ethnic minority backgrounds. The base for the AVID support system is the year-long AVID elective class, which meets for one academic period each day. Students receive explicit instruction in the skills needed for college, including critical thinking skills. In its third year of implementation, the AVID program had grown until it was supporting 436 students in 8 schools. Program cost per student has decreased as student numbers increased. AVID has been successful in selecting a participant group that is culturally diverse. It provides students with a place to belong. AVID students, as a group, are more likely to be in school on a daily basis than other students. The academic performance of AVID students generally exceeds that of their classmates. Although AVID students still perform less well than state and district norms on college admission tests. Both parent and student surveys indicated a positive overall response to the AVID program. By nearly any measure, responses to the program reflect that students are doing well and that students and parents increasingly see AVID participants as college bound students. (Contains 10 tables and 2 references.) (SLD)

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The AVID Program in AISD, 1999-2002

TM034701

Austin Independent School District
Office of Program Evaluation
December, 2002

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The AVID Program in AISD, 1999-2002

2001-2002 Evaluation

Austin Independent School District

Executive Summary

Overview

For students with adequate family, financial and community support, it is relatively simple to provide an education that meets the students' needs and leads to higher education. Unfortunately, not all students have such a background. Other struggling students are disengaged from school due to lack of previous success, boredom, or simply feeling that school is irrelevant to their futures. These students frequently underachieve in school, and while capable of higher education, effectively lock themselves out by selecting an unchallenging curriculum.

AVID is a program designed to help underachieving students with academic potential prepare for entrance into colleges and universities. In the program, participants are primarily from low-income and ethnic minority backgrounds. In AVID, these students are placed in a college prep academic program, and are provided a support system to help students achieve in these classes.

The base for the support system is the year-long AVID elective class, which meets for one academic period a day. Students are expected to enroll in the AVID class every year from the time they are selected for the program until graduation. The AVID class features explicit instruction in the skills needed for success in advanced classes such as note taking, assignment tracking, and college-level writing. In addition, the program provides in-class tutorial support to help students fill any gaps in their educational backgrounds. To develop critical thinking skills the class includes Socratic seminars (a inquiry-based system of learning and problem-solving) and philosophical chairs (debate of current issues). Beyond the classroom, AVID assists students and their parents to develop expectations that the students can achieve a college degree. Study trips, college visits, and guest speakers all play a part in making college a real possibility for students who generally will be among the first in their families to attend. The AVID program also provides professional development to the AVID teachers who then train others on their campuses

Summary of Findings

In its third year of implementation in AISD, the AVID program has grown rapidly, moved to an internal specialist and had two schools selected for demonstration status – a model for other schools to follow.

AVID is now supporting 436 students in eight schools to achieve in challenging honors, pre-AP and AP courses. The program supports them with classes in study skills, with tutoring, with critical thinking exercises, and with college visits.

Several schools have expressed interest in implementing this program on their sites; two have begun the program in the 2002-03 school year. Program cost per pupil served has gone from $2,720 to $755 per student.

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The AVID program is designed to favor selection of ethnic minorities. The program has been successful in selecting a participant group that is culturally diverse. In most of the schools, student participants are primarily of Hispanic backgrounds. This is true even in schools with equivalent numbers of African American students. In two schools, African American students are represented more often than would be expected by their numbers in the school.

The AVID program provides students with a place to belong. The AVID class, teachers, and tutors work closely with students, often one-on-one, and create a supportive atmosphere for achievement in school. AVID students' average daily attendance provides one indicator of how well the program provides that sense of belonging. As shown in the figure below, AVID students, as a group, are more likely than other students to be in school on a daily basis. At Reagan High School, AVID participant attendance is similar to that of the school as a whole.

AVID students' academic performance on TAAS, End-of-Course tests, and enrollment in advanced classes generally exceeds those of their classmates. However, AVID student still perform less well than state and district norms on college admission tests.

Both student and parent surveys indicate a positive overall response to the AVID program. By nearly any measure, responses to the program reflect that students are doing well and that both students and parents increasingly see the AVID participants as college-bound students.

Recommendations

While the program provides students and their families with substantial support, there are recommendations made in order to encourage the continued progress of AVID. The AVID program specialist and staff should:

- Set explicit targets for gender and ethnicity. Collect score sheets on all participating students. Assess reasonable conformance to targets and adherence to program guidelines.
- Ensure that program requirements and responsibilities are clear to all students.
- Determine how much support the program can provide to a participant who is struggling.
- Provide additional support in conjunction with other district initiatives to support AVID participants as they transition to high school.
- Parents have suggested that they would like more frequent communications from the AVID program. Several approaches to this are possible. Selection of an approach should be guided by the characteristics of participant parents, availability of teacher time, and feedback from families.
    - AVID teachers could prepare a monthly or 6-week newsletter that outlines major projects and upcoming events.
    - AVID teachers could provide a narrative description of student progress to accompany report cards. This note should be no more than a paragraph.
    - Students could produce a class newsletter for their parents with teacher assistance and guidance.

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Introduction

For students with adequate family, financial and community support, it is relatively simple to provide an education that meets the students' needs and leads to higher education. Unfortunately, not all students have such a background. According to Haycock (2001), young adults in the 18 – 24 year old age group have widely differing levels of educational attainment. While 90% of Caucasian students and 94% of Asian students had graduated from high school or earned a GED, the rate among African Americans was only 81%. Sixty-three percent of the Hispanic students had graduated. While 76% of Caucasians and 86% of Asians had attended college directly after high school, for African Americans and Hispanics, that figure fell to 71%. Some struggling students become disengaged from school due to lack of previous success, boredom, or simply feeling that school is irrelevant to their futures. These students frequently underachieve in school, and while capable of higher education, effectively lock themselves out by selecting an unchallenging curriculum.

> An AISD AVID teacher shares this story about one of her students. "Cici* was extremely low performing and a probable drop out. In her AVID interview, we made some agreements. She was a little under the middle of the road AVID student. She had tardy issues and some criminal behavior in the past. I put her on "probation" from the moment she entered AVID. The rule was "one strike and you're out". Cici agreed to the terms of her acceptance.
>
> Ever since that first day, Cici has done a 180-degree turn around. She attends all classes and has gone from a .4 GPA to a 2.7 in one semester she has been in AVID. I regularly get progress reports from teachers telling me what a turn-around Cici has made. Cici has benefited from AVID, and she is now my shining star. She reports that her change in her attitude toward school has made her extremely happy. I believe within a few more years, she will have gone from a high school dropout to a college bound senior. I look forward to watching her get her diploma and becoming the person she wants to be."
>
> * Not her real name

The Austin Independent School District (AISD) recognized the need to re-engage these bright yet struggling students and prepare under-represented groups for a more competitive future. Eight schools (four middle and four high schools) selected the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program as one that might best meet the schools' needs. AVID is a program designed to help underachieving students with academic potential prepare for entrance into colleges and universities. In the program, participants are primarily from low-income and ethnic minority backgrounds. In AVID, these students are placed in a college prep academic program, and are provided a support system to help students achieve in these classes.

The base for the support system is the year-long AVID elective class, which meets for one academic period a day. Students are expected to enroll in the AVID class every year from the time they are selected for the program until graduation, although they can drop the program at any time. The AVID class features explicit instruction in the skills needed for success in advanced classes such as note taking, assignment tracking, and

college-level writing. In addition, the program provides in-class tutorial support to help students fill any gaps in their educational backgrounds. To develop critical thinking skills the class includes Socratic seminars (a inquiry-based system of learning and problem-solving) and philosophical chairs (debate of current issues). Beyond the classroom, AVID assists students and their parents to develop expectations that the students can achieve a college degree. Study trips, college visits, and guest speakers all play a part in making college a real possibility for students who generally will be among the first in their families to attend. The AVID program also provides professional development to the AVID teachers who then train others on their campuses.

In AISD, the AVID program has been funded under a Title 1 - Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) grant. The CSRD grant was awarded to the district in 1999 and funded the project for three years. The program was funded on eight secondary campuses across the district – Burnet, Dobie, Lamar, and Webb middle schools and Bowie, Lanier, McCallum, and Reagan high schools. The CSRD grant funding has ended with the end of the 2001-02 school year; it is time to review where the AVID program has been and where it may go in the future.

AVID Fit with other AISD Initiatives

Table 1: Student Populations Targeted for Services by AVID, Bridges, and GEAR UP

Participation Considerations	AVID	GEAR UP	Bridges	Project Advance
Grade-Level	7th -12th Grades	Single student cohort in 8th grade in 2002	9th Grade	Mainly 12th Grade
Low Socio-Economic Status	Free/Reduced Lunch	Free/Reduced Lunch	No target established	No target established
Ethnicity	Under represented college populations	Under represented college populations	No target established	No target established
First Generation College Student	First generation college	First generation college	No target established	First generation college
School Attendance	Students without major attendance problems	No target established	Students w/ poor attendance record	No target established
Discipline Issues	Students without major discipline problems	No target established	No target established	No target established
Course Grades	Students w/ "C" course average	Students in danger of failing or needing help w/ advanced coursework	Students with grades below 75 in any 6-week grading period	Students taking courses that qualify them for college
TAAS/TAKS Performance	Students passing TAAS	Students failing TAAS	Students failing TAAS	Students passing TAAS/TAKS

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Several programs in AISD offer tutoring and share specific goals to close the gap in high school and college preparation. These shared goals are:

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID):

To prepare underachieving students from groups traditionally underserved in post-secondary education to be eligible for and successful in four-year colleges and universities.

Bridges to Ninth-Grade Success:

To increase graduation rates in Texas public schools by reducing the numbers of students retained in ninth grade or who drop out.

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP):

To encourage young, low income, at-risk students to have high expectations, stay in school, and complete the required courses to enter college. This program serves a cohort of students in several schools selected on the basis of poverty and risk factors. The Gear Up cohort was in 8th grade in the 2001-02 school year.

Project Advance:

To provide assistance to high school seniors and their families to secure college admissions and financial aid.

These programs target specific student populations. Often, one or more of the programs may serve the same group of students. Table 1 describes the student populations targeted by AVID, Bridges, GEAR UP and Project Advance.

AVID Program Recap (1999 – 2002)

Table 2: Significant Milestones

Program Year	# Participants	Grades Included	Budget	Significant Event
1999-2000	185	7-10	$503,251	Program Initiated in 8 Schools
2000-2001	398	7-11	$503,251	All Schools Certified in AVID
2001-2002	436	7-12	$491,615	Moved to Internal Model
2002-2003	549*	7-12	$414,502	Two additional schools implementing AVID

* As of October 10, 2002

Sources: AISD Student Records, Program records

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Program Participation

Student Enrollment and Demographics

Program year 1999-2000 was the first year in which the AVID program served students in AISD. Teachers and counselors identified students as eligible for the program based on the following AVID program [1] criteria:

1. Coming from a low income family and/or being an ethnic minority; and
2. Average to high achievement test scores, but earning C-level grades; and
3. Coming from families in which no one has attended college; or
4. Experiencing other circumstances that could impede progress to college.

Table 3: Number of AVID Students by Campus, 1999-2002

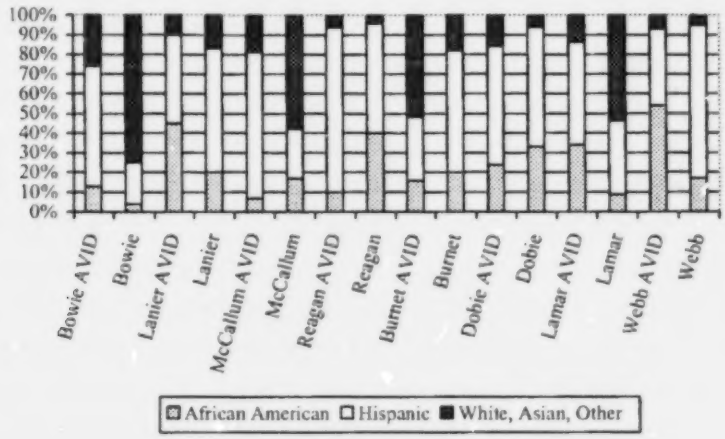
CAMPUS	1999-2000		2000-2001		2001-2002	
	Grade Levels	# Students	Grade Levels	# Students	Grade Levels	# Students
Burnet	7	20	7-8	45	7-8	62
Dobie	7	15	7-8	43	7-8	55
Lamar	8	21	7-8	31	7-8	43
Webb	8	25	7-8	92	7-8	50
Bowie	10	42	9-11	69	9-12	57
Lanier	9-10	37	9-11	58	9-12	67
McCallum	9	14	9-10	26	9-11	56
Reagan	9	11	9-10	34	9-11	46
TOTAL		185		398		436

Source: AISD Student Records

The AVID program has grown steadily since its beginning in 1999. At the same time, AISD has sought and found ways to offer the program more economically, initially by making coordination and implementation of the program the responsibility of an internal program specialist rather than a consulting specialist from another organization. Several schools have expressed interest in implementing this program on their sites; two have begun the program in the 2002-03 school year. Program cost per pupil served has gone from $2,720 to $755 per student. By the end of 2002-03, the cost is likely to be reduced further as more participants are selected for the schools new to the program. Over the life of the program, AVID has been 100% grant funded.

[1] AVID Center program materials

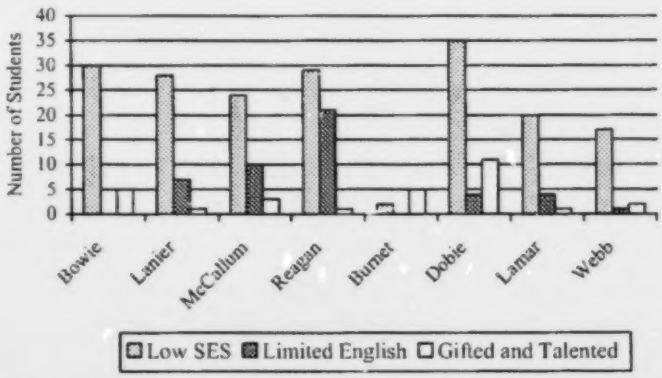
Figure 1: Ethnic Distribution of AVID Participants by School, 2001-02



Source: AISD Student Records

The AVID program is designed to favor selection of ethnic minorities. The program has been successful in selecting a participant group that is culturally diverse. Only at Burnet Middle School do White and Asian students predominate in the program, in contrast to their approximate 26% representation in the school. While distributions of participants by ethnicity differ across schools, some general patterns emerge. In most of the schools, student participants are primarily of Hispanic backgrounds. This is true even in schools with equivalent numbers of African American students. In two schools, African American students are represented more often than would be expected by their numbers in the school. While there are legitimate reasons for these variations to occur, school site teams should examine the selection process at each school to ensure that participants are chosen within program guidelines.

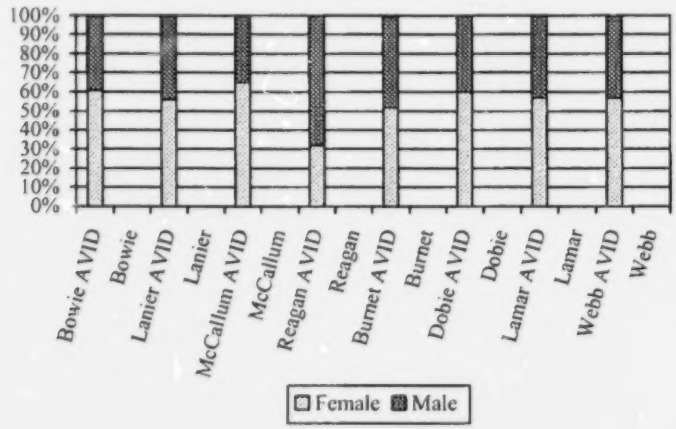
Figure 2: Participant Characteristics by School, 2001-02



Source: AISD Student Records

Only at Reagan High School are there large numbers of students classified as having limited English skills, although participants with adequate English skills sometimes have parents whose English is limited. Most of the schools have significant numbers of students in poverty in the AVID program. Few AVID students are identified as gifted and talented.

Figure 3: AVID Participants by Gender, 2001-02



Source: AISD Student Records

At most schools there are more girls than boys in the AVID program – sometimes a great many more. Only Reagan has more boys than girls in its program. AVID is not intended as a program for one gender or the other; however there are several possible reasons for the genders not to be evenly represented. First, students decide for themselves whether they are interested in the program. Girls may apply more often than boys. Girls may also be selected for the program more often than boys (or the opposite at Reagan) due to criteria set by the selection committee at the individual school. Girls may be more likely to demonstrate the behavioral characteristics such as good attendance and low discipline problems the program requires. Finally, girls may decide more often than boys to continue to do the hard work required to stay in the program.

The 'gender gap' shown is not necessarily a problem for the program. AVID site teams should monitor the application process to ensure that is doesn't unreasonably exclude one gender or the other. The AVID program director should also stay aware of the selection process and guide the site teams to make decisions based on program guidelines should problems be observed.

Student Achievements

Attendance

Under the selection criteria for the program, AVID students are expected to demonstrate regular attendance as a condition for selection into the program. AVID also requires high attendance for students to be allowed to remain in the program. Thus high

attendance is a precursor, a requirement and an expected result of the program. At the same time, the AVID program targets students who are at greater risk for developing attendance problems and may help these students to resist attendance problems.

The AVID program provides students with a place to belong. The AVID class, teachers, and tutors work closely with students, often one-on-one, and create a supportive atmosphere for achievement in school. AVID students' average daily attendance provides one indicator of how well the program provides that sense of belonging. As shown in the figure below, AVID students, as a group, are more likely than other students to be in school on a daily basis. At Reagan High School, AVID participant attendance is similar to that of the school as a whole.

Table 4: Average Attendance Rates of AVID Students by School, 2000-01

School	AVID Students	All Students
Bowie	93.5	90.2
Lanier	91.9	86.9
McCallum	91.7	89.4
Reagan	88.2	88.6
Burnet	N/A	91.8
Dobie	92.7	92.3
Lamar	95.0	90.6
Webb	95.4	92.1

Source: AISD Student Records

Advanced Classes

Advanced Placement (AP) class enrollments in the 2001-2002 school year show that AVID students are beginning to select AP classes as some AVID students are now in 11th and 12th grades. While AP enrollment has not yet reached the level of honors enrollment, the numbers in AP classes are growing. Fifty-three students passed AP courses in 2001-02. Of these, 31 (58%) elected to take the difficult AP exams offered by the College Board. Thirteen (42%) of these students wrote exams that exceeded the criterion score of 3 and therefore are eligible for college credit.

Table 5: Advanced Placement Classes by Students in the AVID Program, 2000-02

School	AVID					AVID School				
	# 11th & 12th Grade	AP Classes Passed	AP Tests Taken	AP Tests Pass (Score 3+)	% of Tests Passed	# 11th & 12th Grade	AP Classes Passed	AP Tests Taken	AP Tests Pass (Score 3+)	% of Tests Passed
Bowie	26	30	24	12	50%	1227	932	652	347	53%
Lanier	18	10	4	1	25%	710	133	77	46	60%
McCallum	16	6	1	0	0	701	622	464	315	68%
Reagan	14	7	2	0	0	493	89	42	4	10%

Source: AISD Student Records

In comparison, students at the AVID schools took 1,235 total AP exams. Of these, 712 (58%) were at or above the criterion score.

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Table 6: Honors Classes Taken by AVID Students, 2001–2002

School	Math	Language Arts	Science	Social Studies	Foreign Lang.	Electives	TOTAL	Average
Bowie	22	33	18	34	4	1	112	2.0
Lanier	30	48	8	42	12	0	140	2.1
McCallum	21	9	19	12	15	2	78	1.4
Reagan	7	21	11	24	0	0	63	1.4

Source: AVID Program Specialist

In addition to honors and AP classes, four AVID students took college courses for dual credit.

End of Course Tests

End of Course Tests (EOC) are standardized across the state of Texas and measure the extent to which students have mastered the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. Students are not required to take these tests. Students who pass the Algebra and English II tests plus at least one of the other two tests are currently exempt from the need to pass the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in order to graduate (graduation years 2002-2004). Students in the class of 2005 and thereafter will no longer be able to substitute EOC tests for TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills).

Performance of AVID students and the students as a whole in each of the schools is compared in Table 7. Passing rates on the Algebra test have historically lagged performance on other exams and thus Algebra is a gatekeeper course for becoming exempt from the Exit TAAS. AVID students are doing well in EOC tests as compared with other students at their schools. Only Bowie AVID students failed to equal or exceed the performance of their schools.

Table 7: Comparison of End of Course Tests Results between AVID Participants and School – Percent Passing, 2001-02

	Algebra		Biology		English II		US History	
	AVID	School	AVID	School	AVID	School	AVID	School
Bowie	71%	81%	100%	90%	88%	71%	93%	85%
Lanier	45%	18%	82%	60%	80%	64%	92%	70%
McCallum	59%	37%	79%	79%	86%	81%	100%	88%
Reagan	29%	21%	67%	46%	79%	41%	67%	44%
Burnet	100%	100%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dobie	100%	53%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lamar	100%	100%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Webb	100%	90%	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: AISD Student Records

Student Failure

While the AVID students taken as a group did very well in the measures collated herein, a small number of AVID students showed school problems. High school students advance from grade to grade by amassing at least 5 credits during the year. A student can advance without gaining 5 credits only if sufficient credits have been gained in a previous

year to make up for the deficit. Since a typical course load includes 7 credits of courses, only a student failing at least two full year courses (or parts of more) will fail to advance. Other students may be struggling but will still continue to advance. In the 2001-02 school year, 30 AVID students (13.3%) failed to gain 5 credits and 13 (5.7%) did not have the total credits to advance to the next grade. Report card and course history data were analyzed for these 28 students to look for patterns as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Patterns of Failure among AVID High School Students

School	# Under 5 Credits/ # Failing to Advance	Selection Issue	Too Many Advanced Classes/Too Little Support	Behavior Issues	Exit AVID
Bowie	6 / 4	0	5	1	4 (1 doing well since)
Lanier	8 / 4	1	5	2	5 (1 doing well since)
McCallum	3 / 0	1	1	1	2
Reagan	13 / 4	2	7	4	4

Source: AISD Student Records

The evaluator considered students to have faced a selection issue only when the student entered AVID during or after 9th grade and their previous grades appeared to not fit the AVID profile. A student with very low grades is allowed to be in AVID if the selection committee feels that the student can still benefit from the program. A student who entered AVID on or before the start of 9th grade might still have been poorly selected, however the data were not available to assess selection of these students.

The majority of cases were classed as "Too many advanced classes or too little support." These students showed several profiles. Some took more advanced classes each year in spite of doing poorly in the previous year. Others appeared to be taking advanced classes in disciplines that were not strength areas. In these schools most of the AVID students were in the same advanced classes. Others failed for no discernable reason. A student was classified as failing for behavioral reasons if their failures were accompanied by high rates of truancy.

The small number of failing students should not take away from the generally strong academic performance of students in the AVID program but may point to some possible program improvements. First, many AVID students perform worse in their first year of the program as they adjust to a more challenging curriculum and expectations. All students should be counseled on the possibility that they may initially perform less well. Secondly, some students may require a more intensive and individualized approach to be successful in the program. The program specialist should consider how much additional support the program can provide to prevent these students from slipping through the cracks. Finally if students are failing high school classes, adding more honors or AP classes to their schedules is probably not the best approach.

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College Testing

Eighteen of the AVID students took either or both of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT – 14 students) or ACT Assessment (8 students). These few students represent only a first indication of how AVID students will fare after high school. On average, the AVID students still lag the state average scores on each of these tests. The average AVID student taking the ACT scored 17.5. This value compares to an average 20.6 in AISD and 20.2 composite for Texas.[2] The average SAT score of 961.4 was also lower than the 1043 in AISD and 987 average score for Texas.[3] However, four of these students achieved scores that were high enough to exempt that student from the TASP exam (minimum 500 on each part of the SAT or 22 on each of the English and mathematics portions of the ACT). As more AVID students reach graduation, college entrance exams and acceptance should continue to be monitored.

College Attendance

AVID students in AISD are just beginning to graduate from high school so participants' college futures are not yet evident. However, there were 126 seniors who participated in AVID in 2001-2002 in districts across Texas. One hundred-sixteen of these students responded to a survey conducted in April and May of 2002 (Cossio, Huerta, and Watt 2002)[4]. Of these students, 85% indicated they would graduate on the Recommended plan and an additional 9% would graduate on the Distinguished Achievement plan. Ninety-eight percent planned to attend college after graduation. Sixty-one percent planned to attend a 4-year college while the remaining 37%planned to attend a two-year college. It will be a substantial increase in college going rates if these figures apply to AISD in the future. In the 2002-2003 school year, evidence of college attendance will begin to be collected for AISD.

TAAS Results

AVID students performed well on the Exit level TAAS. Table 9 indicates the performance of AVID 10th graders on the TAAS as compared with that of the school as a whole. Table 10 shows middle school TAAS performance. While the passing rates of middle school students' are below those of the high school students, taken as a whole, the middle school AVID participants' performances met or exceeded that of the school as a whole.

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[2] From the ACT website http://www.act.org/news/data/02/states.html

[3] Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, 2000-01

[4] Cossio, G., Huerta, J., and Watt, K. (2002) pp.4-9.

Table 9: Exit TAAS Passing Rates for High School AVID Students and School-wide in 2001-02

School	AVID Students # Taking			% Passing			School-wide % Passing		
	Writing	Math	Reading	Writing	Math	Reading	Writing	Math	Reading
Bowie	17	17	17	94	94	94	94	95	98
Lanier	16	16	16	100	94	94	66	70	81
McCallum	21	21	21	95	100	100	92	86	93
Reagan	14	14	14	86	86	79	66	63	74

Source: AISD Student Records

Table 10: TAAS Passing Rates for AVID Students and School-wide in Middle School, 2001-02

School	AVID Students # Taking			% Passing			School-wide % Passing		
	Writing	Math	Reading	Writing	Math	Reading	Writing	Math	Reading
Burnet	38	61	61	84	92	90	72	81	74
Dobie	21	55	55	76	82	87	66	71	70
Lamar	22	43	43	95	98	95	82	91	90
Webb	37	48	48	62	79	77	71	78	76

Source: AISD Student Records

Summary of Student Achievement

By most measures, AVID students are performing well in school. Attendance continues to be strong and TAAS passing rates exceed those of the student body. End of course passing rates are generally very high. Most students are taking advanced courses and passing them. All of these measures show that AVID students do well in measures normed for Texas.

Student achievement still shows room for improvement. AVID students are beginning to take courses and exams normed for a national student base. Significant numbers of AVID students are beginning to take the college-level AP classes. Performance on the AP exams lags the performance of other examinees at the AVID schools, but just taking these exams is a mark of how far these students have come from the "C students" who entered the AVID program.

A small number of AVID students are unsuccessful in the program. These students are in danger of not advancing to the next grade and not graduating on time. Examination of these students' profiles may suggest some program improvements.

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Results of Parent and Student Survey

Survey Procedures

The AVID program manager distributed both parent and student surveys to the AVID elective teachers in late April of 2002. Teachers were to allow students to complete the survey in class and to take the parent surveys home for completion. Surveys were completed during the last week of school. Survey information collected did not include names or identification numbers.

There were 436 students in the AVID program in 2001-02. Of these, 293 surveys were collected from students (67%). One hundred fifty-five parent surveys were returned (34%). These return rates were not evenly distributed. Burnet Middle School did not return any surveys (the Burnet AVID teacher indicated that surveys were returned by campus mail but none arrived) and McCallum High School did not return any parent surveys. Only four parent surveys were returned by Bowie High School. It is anticipated given the low response rate that parent surveys are more likely to represent the views of the most involved parents at those schools that returned surveys and may not represent the views of AVID parents as a whole.

Program Impressions

Both student and parent surveys indicate a positive overall response to the AVID program. By nearly any measure, responses to the program reflect that students are doing well and that both students and parents increasingly see the AVID participants as college-bound students. Sixty-four percent of the parents and fifty-seven percent of the students report that the students are happier in school since joining AVID. Younger students and those who have been in the program for less time are more likely than older students to report that school has improved for them. It may be that the less experienced AVID students have more immediate memories of how they felt before and since joining AVID, while students who have been in the program longer may be more likely to have 'normalized' their experiences.

It appears that some AVID students feel themselves more stressed in the program than they were before joining it. Thirty-five percent of the parents (reporting on their children) and 40 percent of the students report that they are more stressed since being in AVID. About 30 percent of each group disagree with that premise. Some of this stress may have come from the more difficult academics. Thirty-seven percent of parents and 25 percent of the students report that students have failed classes since starting the program. These statistics are not cause for immediate concern, but should be monitored to ensure that the program does not reduce a student's ability to graduate on time.

The students appear to be willing to complete the more difficult coursework involved as part of being in the AVID program. Sixty-two percent of the students plan to stay in the program, with 14% planning to leave and a similar number undecided (program departures include students leaving due to moving or district tracking patterns). Most students (55%) agree that they are taking more challenging coursework in the program (17% disagree). Students in the program longer are more likely to report that they are taking more challenging coursework. This claim is supported by their reports of numbers

of honors courses. Two thirds of the students report taking 2 or more advanced or honors courses.

Program Features

Students hold positive opinions on all aspects of the AVID program. However, there are some interesting differences in how the program features are perceived. At four of the seven schools, few students understood the term, "Socratic Seminar." Where students understood the term (high schools) the seminars were thought to be only fairly helpful. Similarly, philosophical chairs were largely unknown at two schools (Dobie and Webb middle schools). However, students who were aware of the term found this feature to be quite helpful to them. The AVID notebook is most appreciated by middle school students as a whole, but student views of this feature vary substantially.

The feature that met with universal acclaim is the AVID teacher. Nearly all students at every school responded that the AVID teacher was very helpful. It seems obvious that students targeted for AVID both need and appreciate having an adult mentoring them through secondary school. Both parents and students see a strong need for more information on how to apply for college financial aid.

Parents report that they rarely, if ever, attend parent meetings for the AVID program. It is not surprising then to note that most don't know whether or not they are satisfied with the program information provided. Parents report that they receive communications from the AVID teacher (by phone, mail, note, or e-mail) about once or twice per year. Most parents would prefer to hear from the AVID teacher more frequently – about every six weeks.

Summary and Recommendations

Selection Criteria

The data indicate that over-representative proportions of females and Hispanics have been selected for the program. Additionally, a small number of students are not advancing from grade to grade due to failing classes. Some of these students may need more support to be successful, more appropriate schedules or to exit the program. To improve program selection:

- Set explicit targets for gender and ethnicity. Collect score sheets on all participating students. Assess reasonable conformance to targets and adherence to program guidelines.
- Ensure that the selection committee is appropriately selecting students who are willing to succeed in challenging, honors-level course work.

Student Failure

Students in the AVID program, especially new program participants and students transitioning to high school, may have difficulties in their classes. Students who are less successful in the AVID program sometimes fail one or even several classes. These students then must make up the credits in summer school or find themselves unable to graduate from high school on time. A student who overcomes a bad beginning to high school can go on to develop strengths needed to be successful in challenging classes.

However, it is important for students to understand that risk exists when they sign on for the program.

- Counsel new participants that their performance may decline initially.
- Determine how much support the program can provide to struggling participants. Consider setting up a 'triage' system to provide additional support for failing students. Consider adding tutor hours to work with small groups of these students.
- Provide additional support in conjunction with other district initiatives to support AVID participants especially as they transition to high school.

Communications

Parents have suggested that they would like more frequent communications from the AVID program. Several approaches to this are possible. Selection of an approach should be guided by the characteristics of participant parents, availability of teacher time, and feedback from families.

- AVID teachers could prepare a monthly or 6-week newsletter that outlines major projects and upcoming events.
- AVID teachers could provide a narrative description of student progress to accompany report cards. This note should be no more than a paragraph.
- Students could produce a class newsletter for their parents with teacher assistance and guidance.

References

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